News release

TV forecasts in Africa

2 May 2002

African communities now have better access to weather forecasts as a result of new affordable weather forecasting and broadcasting equipment developed by the Met Office. This will help prevent African communities from losing vital crops each year because they don't have access to a simple weather forecast.

In the UK, using the weather forecast to plan farming activities is a practice that is taken for granted. The introduction of the new equipment from the Met Office will enable African communities to plan the best time to plant and harvest their crops. Having access to a weather forecast means that they can avoid heavy rain, which may wash away seedlings, or heavy winds that may damage a valuable crop just before harvesting. The benefits of being able to plan ahead mean that communities have a better chance of providing sufficient food for their families and being able to sell more produce.

A local meteorologist will use the new equipment to prepare a simple 'PowerPoint' weather forecast presentation. This will be prepared using weather observation data that they have already collected and analysed. The presentation itself can be as simple as a map with static graphics representing clouds, rain and sunshine or it can be more sophisticated with animations (for example flashing lightning). The meteorologist then records a voice over commentary in the local language and gives the presentation to a local broadcasting studio for transmission on television. Although not everyone is fortunate enough to have access to a television in their own home in Africa, the majority of rural areas have a bar where the community will congregate to watch the daily weather broadcast.

Members of the community operating the weather broadcasting equipment

Steve Palmer, technical co-ordinator at the Met Office, said: "The Met Office has been working to provide easy, affordable access to weather information to developing countries for some time, particularly with its involvement in RANET (radio and internet for the communication of hydrological and climate-related information). As part of our RANET activities, we have been providing forecasting equipment and online educational resources to African communities."

"We are delighted to be able to extend the support we give to meteorologists and communities in Africa by developing a lower-cost television broadcast system to the existing radio and internet services provided. We hope to be able to provide weather forecasting services to meet the needs of ten African countries this year, compared with only three last year."

Mr Palmer has been presented with a Met Office Innovation Award in recognition of the work he has done to develop this innovative, affordable new resource for African communities.

Notes

The following links will provide more information on RANET and its activities:

RANET main home site

RANET is a product of ACMAD the African Centre for Meteorological Applications for Development Information about WorldSpace Foundation.

For further information:
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